Yekibna Hawariyat

The church woodland of Yekibna Hawariyat is somewhat unique because it is totally protected and is not currently under any threats. There is plenty of tree regeneration under a canopy of *Juniperus procera* and the site is species rich. The area of forest destroyed to run a power line is now extremely rich in lepidopteras and has a few rare plant species.

Name: **Yekibna Hawariyat**

Status: church
Site Code: GJ03
Floristic Region: GJ
Region: 3 (East Gojam)
Altitude: 2310 m
Latitude: 10º 12' N
Longitude: 37º 44' E

Woodland/forest:
Status: relict
Size: 5 ha
Dominant species:
canopy: *Euphorbia candelabrum*, *Juniperus procera*
shrub: *Justicia schimperiana*
No of woody species: 62
No of species with less than 5 individuals: 6
Threats: none

Photograph: The Yekibna Hawariyat forest, situated beyond the larger plantation, is situated on the plateau at the edge of the first escarpment. The large gap created through the forest to run the power line is clearly visible to the left of the forest.

Yekibna Hawariyat forest is located on the edge of highland plateau and on the upper parts of the first escarpment. Most of the site is flat with a 15 m drop at the escarpment.

The forest is dominated by a high canopy of *Juniperus procera* and an open subcanopy of *Euphorbia candelabrum* of various sizes, suggesting that in due course the latter species will become canopy dominant as no regeneration of juniper was observed. The shrub layer is dense in places as a light overstorey allows much light into the forest. The wooded strip below the power line is an open scrub containing much *Acacia abyssinica* regeneration. Some of the regeneration is also occurring on the escarpment and the forest is slowly expanding.

The region has a very open landscape with most of the land under cultivation. There are some areas with a high density of planted eucalypts and to the North, starting at the forest edge, there is a large plantation of the exotic *Cupressus lusitanica*. The only natural vegetation remaining is around churches or monasteries (see site account of Aba Asirat about 10 km to the North) which are situated at the edge of the plateau or below the first escarpment.

History

The Yekibna Hawariyat has been established for a long time, probably over a century. In former times the main track used to run right across the forest and some sunken sections are still observable today. Some decades ago the track was re-routed to the East of the forest.

A few years ago the power company arrived one morning and bulldozed, despite the protests of the local farming community, a 50 m wide transect right across the forest. The trees were just discarded after been pushed down the escarpment. The locals were then instructed to prevent the vegetation from growing more than around 3 m in height.

In recent years the community has been rebuilding the church which by early 2002 was nearly completed. In order to reduce the amount resources required for the construction all, walls were made out of thousands of mud bricks. Furthermore, windows will be made out of metal instead of timber.

Conservation status

This woodland has a high number of woody plant species and the area under the power line possesses rare species. The artificially maintained acacia dominated scrub has a very density and probably high species richness of butterflies. Although the construction of the power line was extremely destructive of the forest environment it has created a sheltered habitat in which lepidopteras thrive as observed nowhere else during our field surveys. The forest itself has had very limited human related disturbance, including herbivory, for decades.

One day all the mature trees along this transect were bulldozed away to make for a power line. This area, which transects right across the church woodland has now to be kept by the church community with vegetation no higher than 3 m. This sheltered habitat has now a high density and diversity of lepidoptera not observable elsewhere.

Threats

No threats of any kind could be identified.

Management

No new management procedures are necessary at the moment. As long as the community keeps livestock out of the ground the site will remain intact. The reintroduction of *Podocarpus falcatus*, observed at a nearby churchyard and therefore probably native to this area, from local seed source may be worth considering.

